



OFFICE OF THE
WATER DEPARTMENT
TOWN HALL, 511 MAIN STREET
DUNSTABLE, MA 01827-1313
(978) 649-4514 FAX (978) 649-8893
waterdept@dunstable-ma.gov

Water Commission Minutes
Wednesday, July 28, 2021

Approved: 8/25/21

John O'Brien called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm
Other member(s) present: Mat Morton
Meeting held: At the Dunstable Town Hall, 511 Main Street, lower level
In attendance: Dan St. Jean

Reviewed & Signed:

- All Bills Outstanding Since Last Meeting
- All Payroll Outstanding Since Last Meeting

Well No. 1 Operational Update & Department Operations Update

Mr. O'Brien reported all things are running normally on the well. There is also nothing new to report on the tank either. Still he noted he needs to follow up with Mr. Bray and Mr. Palaia. As for operations most things are going smoothly. The only major matter was the water rate hearing. There will be a meter read on August 1, 2021 and then another reading closer to billing for the fall and the bill will be blended on the rates with the new rates taking effect after August 1.

Infrastructure Project Update

Mr. O'Brien reported there is nothing on this agenda topic to report. The project is complete and with the water rate hearing done the department will now focus on paying for the infrastructure project. Otherwise the only thing to report is that the Board of Selectmen and the Roads Commission while working on the Rt. 113 Project have made attempts to see to it that some of the water pipe and mains in the area are replaced since the roadway will be opened and in some places shifted. Now in order to do so they hope to use ARPA money or other funds which may come as a result of the infrastructure talks being held by Congress assuming it may be done. The work would range anywhere between one option for roughly \$230,000 to another option for roughly \$250,000 with the optimal being both options for close to \$500,000. Such work would not only benefit the water ratepayers in the area but also the system as a whole. Mr. Morton submitted that the area being contemplated are Hillcrest Street and a portion of Westford Street with the most desirable option being the completion of a loop in the system there. Mr. Voelker noted the Board of Selectmen are committed to utilizing any funding available and have actively lobbied the towns representation in the Massachusetts General Court for funding should federal sources fail to be found.

SWSS Update

Mr. O'Brien reported there are no major issues. SWSS is working like normal.

Next Meeting/Regular Meetings

The next meeting would have tentatively been set for August 18, 2021, but the Commission determined to call it for August 25, 2021 instead.

Authorization of Accounts Payable & Payroll

The Commission considered and signed off on all of its outstanding bills. The Commission then reviewed and approved payment of the bills and also signed all outstanding department payroll. Mr. O'Brien then briefly reported on all bills he'd reviewed and approved since the last meeting in his capacity as chair. He noted these are the usual ones, utilities, SWSS, alarm, and the like.

Water Rates

Mr. O'Brien submitted there is nothing to report here. The hearing happened and will have its own set of minutes which will be published.

Question on Water Bill for 533 Main Street

Mr. O'Brien went over the narrative formed from the bills and the meter reads done in regards to questions to this account. There were two whole years of estimated bills due to a belief that there was something wrong with the meter. But the meter was brought to Pepperell for testing and it turned out the meter wasn't broken. So the number was accurate and what was estimated was taken and detracted from the meter number. All that is being billed is the difference. Mr. St. Jean conceded he understands the math but contended that the amount of water use couldn't in his mind be true. He elaborated that he can follow the departments logic, but contended that when the actual meter reading was taken about the time it was assumed the meter was broken the number wasn't recorded. He also asked why it was that it took two years for his meter to be checked. He was estimated for two years. He stated he has a simple farmhouse with one bathroom, one toilet, one wash machine, and 3-5 people in the house. Although he's had as many as 6 since he has 4 children. Still his activity hasn't in his mind changed. He then presented some photos of his old meter and elaborated that a small red triangle on the left seen in the picture measures things like back pressure that might indicate a leak in the system. Now when this was done, no one was using water and that red triangle was turning. This would have indicated to him the meter had an issue. Mr. O'Brien submitted if there was a leak generally speaking the only way that it would be shown is if the water is getting to the meter. Mr. St. Jean responded that he has experienced a water main issue within the last decade. Probably about 7 years ago. He accounted how that winter water started bubbling at his backdoor and the line coming in indicated a problem. Since it was past the curb he had to have the work done to repair. Now he didn't indicate this is the source of the problem, but the same meter was kept. Mr. O'Brien noted that the meter cannot count what doesn't pass through it. So if there's a leak it would have to be past the meter. Mr. St. Jean responded that this is a hard question as it isn't a simple billing cycle but rather a two year one. Mr. O'Brien noted that during the two years there was some difficulty at reading the meter.

Mr. St. Jean contended his meter can be read from outside the house and thus his being present at home wouldn't have been necessary for the meter to have been read. Mr. O'Brien looked over the records provided by Ms. Bresnick and SWSS. He noted that most of the time the water usage was in the 40,000 to 50,000 a year range. This adjusted bill would be around 200,000 over a two year period which could track to that. The usage historically went up save a period where it fell a little. Mr. St. Jean noted that he had several of his children at home and then they went to college. Currently he's back to a fuller home due to the pandemic. He still argued that even if you look at his historical usage and even if you assume it has been growing that still doesn't explain the volume. Mr. O'Brien returned to the red triangle noting that this doesn't impact the meter number. Mr. St. Jean responded that even if that's true, the number if accurate would represent almost a doubling of usage which he couldn't fathom. He then presented a spreadsheet with the data he obtained from Ms. Bresnick noting she was very helpful and responsive to him. There was a side question from Mr. Morton as to the last time rates were raised prior to the latest. Mr. O'Brien recalled it was done in 2019. Mr. Voelker had the same recollection as it occurred very early in Mr. Palaia's tenure. He started in

January of 2019. Mr. St. Jean then provided a bit more background on his spreadsheet and how he correlated things. Both Mr. Morton and Mr. O'Brien went over the data provided. If a leak exists, it would have to be inside the house in all likelihood. Mr. O'Brien asked about whether an irrigation system is in place. Mr. St. Jean responded he does have an irrigation system, but it went in after the new meter and not the old meter. Mr. O'Brien submitted that discussion would be had with SWSS and other department personnel and the Water Department. Generally the consensus of the Commission was that the math doesn't work and the meter may still have had an issue. It could be, as the Supreme Court says, a matter that is capable of repetition but evasive of review. After considering the highest bills paid and mindful of the need not to set a precedent, the Commission considered adjusting the bill. His average would be 57,175 gallons per billing cycle. This would put it between the two highest historical bills. So using this average it would make his bill essentially \$1,280 versus \$3,513.68. For lack of any other way to prove one way or the other and because it's a two year old bill, the Commission felt this is the best medium. There is a new meter now and we have a high degree of confidence going forward in the accuracy of the numbers. It was therefore decided to lower the bill to \$1,280. The Commission also determined that a different process should be used for estimated billing as part of this was compounded by the estimated bill being far lower than it should have been given the historical data.

A motion was made by Mr. Morton to accept the lowering of the bill for 533 Main Street to \$1,280 with this not to set a precedent in light of the unique circumstances regarding a meter that was replaced. The motion was seconded by Mr. O'Brien and passed by majority vote.

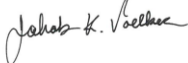
Minutes

The Commission considered the minutes from June 23, 2021. Seeing no reason not to approve them the Commission proceeded with doing so.

A motion was made by Mr. Morton to approve the minutes of June 23, 2021 as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. O'Brien and passed by majority vote.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Morton at 7:06 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. O'Brien and passed by majority vote.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Voelker
Administrative Assistant, Dunstable Water Department